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We informed Foreign Office orally today of views contained Dept's 3622 repeated Saigon 4487. Official ministry relations with Associated States was present. We left with Foreign Office informal memo Dept's questions in paraphrased form.

Last night Foreign Office summoned us to say that they had received a telegram from Ambassador Couve informing them of an interview he had had with the Secretary April 11, gist of which was, they state:

1. Department now willing to consider replacement Diem but that whoever or whatever might replace him would be strictly nationalist and have identification neither as puppet of French (like some previous officials) nor of Americans, as Diem.

2. Whatever steps are now to be taken to establish a more effective govt in Vietnam must not be made to look like a victory of sects, primarily Binh Xuyen, over Diem govt,

3. Steps should be taken immediately in Saigon to bring about "spontaneous" departure of Sang as police chief. This would presumably be done as part of whatever arrangements is made with Binh Xuyen as part of overall suggested alternative solution. Comment: French observed that they agreed heartily with all three points. They observed that in deciding on next steps only Saigon is qualified to make a proper evaluation of all factors and recommendations for future action.

In discussing matter French expressed great satisfaction in indication that once again French and US views were approaching each other and that we would be able to get on with the job, they reiterated strong conviction that decision to replace Diem is wise one and that we must now devote all our efforts to finding substitute which will work. They refrained entirely from any reference to past Franco-US differences of opinion on Indochinese affairs. They laid most emphasis on point that they were now more convinced than ever that center of Franco-US action must be in Saigon. It was in recognition this fact that Collins and Ely were first sent and given powers they now enjoy by their respective govts. French intend to give their representative in Saigon freer hand than ever and trust Dept will do same with Collins

By ___ NLE Date 7-15-87

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We told Foreign Office that we had no instructions from Dept since our last meeting on April 9 (Embtel 3495 repeated Saigon 437), and therefore could not comment on Ambassador Couve's account of his interview with the Secretary. Comment: If French account is inaccurate or incomplete would appreciate receiving guidance.

Today foreign Office reiterated principle that answers to Dept's specific questions contained in Deptel 3622 and other related questions must be submitted by Saigon. They would forward questions to Ely immediately and ask him to submit detailed plan for action as soon as possible after coordination with Collins. Govt would then pass on Ely's recommendations here and they would be presented to us.

Suggestion that French govt send representative to Washington was not well received on grounds that it would be unproductive for such official to go until plan was set by Ely and coordinated with Collins, by which time its details would be known to Washington by means of normal diplomatic exchanges. In any event they will reconsider question as plans for further action are devised in Saigon and submitted there for approval.

During our conversation with French we emphasized point that it was for French to set plan and that we would then consider whether we would support it. They offered no resistance to this concept and there was no indication of any sort that question of replacement of Diem had arisen out of US initiative.

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